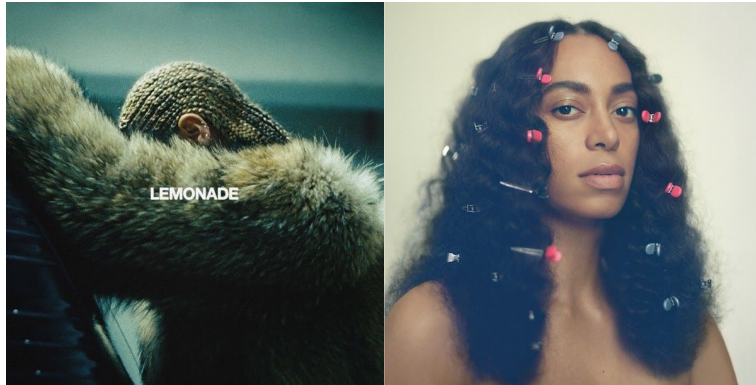


The Knowles Sisters: #BlackGirlMagic #BlackArtMatters



The power of music and art is unlike any other. Its power lies in its ability to creatively impart knowledge that would otherwise be dismissed or left unbothered. This year's most influential and most "talked about" albums were '*Lemonade*' and '*A Seat At The Table*'. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram created a timeline for the release of both artistic works and then exploded with praises once they dropped. Although both Solange's '*A Seat At The Table*' and Beyoncé's '*Lemonade*' desire to empower and uplift the Black community, the way they do so is entirely different. Beyoncé's album is culturally transformative. It uses the Black female experience to craft a piece of art that essentially transforms our experience into a universal one while Solange's album validates the Black experience creating a work that is truly F.U.B.U (for us by us).

Album Singles: Formation vs Don't Touch My Hair

They say that an album's single sets the mood for the rest of the album. So what does "Formation" say about Beyoncé's album '*Lemonade*'? What does "Don't Touch My Hair" say about Solange's album '*A Seat At The Table*'? Well, the titles alone denote that Solange's album is unapologetically Black while Beyoncé's "Blackness" has to be decoded.

Okay Ladies now let's get in formation cause I slay.- 'Formation'

The hook of “Formation” is the only part that is indicative of individuals other than Beyonce herself. The remainder of the song seems more like a lament, or discount of things that occurred in Beyonce’s life and her response to them as a Black woman. Her album is full of that; her responses to situations from the perspective of a Black woman. Does this sharing of personal experience equate to an album specifically devoted to Black female empowerment?

Don't touch my hair

When it's the feelings I wear

Don't touch my soul

When it's the rhythm I know

Don't touch my crown

They say the vision I've found

Don't touch what's there

When it's the feelings I wear - 'Don't Touch My Hair'

Similar to the lyrical content of ‘*Lemonade*’, the lyrics of “Don’t Touch My Hair” draw from Solange’s experiences as a Black woman. However, the feeling of being exploited, violated and/or treated as a novelty for the texture of her hair is a sentiment shared by the entirety of the Black community. She crafted her album as a mouthpiece for the community at large to make a political statement in a time where it’s absolutely necessary. In that regard, her album is unapologetically and unequivocally Black.

Communication Strategies: Lyricism and Imagery

Music is one of the most powerful communication mechanisms present in the world. Aside from alluring melody lines the most important communicative property of music is the lyrics. However, in today's society, most mainstream songs rely on the communicative property of the music video. Ideally, the purpose of a music video is to promote artists, a brand or the track. The video integrates both the song, and the imagery for artistic purposes. In terms of this topic, Beyonce relies on the power of the music video while Solange relies on her lyricism alone.

Middle fingers up, put them hands high

Wave it in his face, tell him, boy, bye

Tell him, boy, bye... boy bye...

Middle fingers up

I ain't thinking 'bout you (sorry)- 'Sorry'



These lyrics don't suggest anything specific to Black women other than the slang terms that are interwoven into the cadence. Only when you watch the video that you realize she is speaking to a Black female audience. The imagery in this video draws from Nigeria and Kenya through the hairstyles and face markings present on each one of the women in the video. Similarly "Hold Up" harbors the same issue.

Hold up, they don't love you like I love you

Slow down, they don't love you like I love you

Back up, they don't love you like I love you

Step down, they don't love you like I love you- 'Hold Up'



Although as a Black woman, I fully identify with the feeling of inadequacy associated with a significant other, so does every woman scorned. While Beyonce is speaking to Black women and drawing from her experience, every woman can identify with these lyrics. The only way to gain clarity on who her audience is to watch the video. She parades around in a yellow dress portraying the Yoruba goddess Oshun, the goddess of love, beauty and fertility. This creates a direct connection to African culture and recognizes the power encompassed in the Black female. The true celebration of Black women housed in *'Lemonade'* is communicated through the visual album portion of the project.

I ran into this girl, I said, "I'm tired of explaining"

Man, this shit is draining

But I'm not really allowed to be mad- 'Mad'

Conversely, Solange's album is accompanied by a digital photo album but not a collection of music videos. Since this is true, the lyricism is more important as a communication device. The above lyrics are simple yet they mean so much. As members of the African, American community we're expected to be patriotic, entertainers, openly ridiculed, culturally appropriated, belittled, and exploited yet content in the midst of all of that. Ideally, we're not supposed to get mad. Otherwise, we're labeled as savage beasts. This song is a social commentary of the constant fight Black people face everyday and the ignorance that combats it.

For us, this shit is from us

Get so much from us

Then forget us

Don't feel bad if you can't sing along

Just be glad you got the whole wide world

This us

This shit is from us

Some shit you can't touch- 'F.U.B.U'

F.U.B.U (for us by us) is one of the most important tracks on the album. It encompasses the album's purpose in the lyricism. This artistic work was created for and by Black people. The album captures different aspects of the Black experience and uses the music and lyrics to validate said experience. The above lyrics are a prime example of the complex sentiment of the African American community verbalized in a clear and concise manner. Truthfully, the entirety of Solange's album is structured that way. It takes the complexity of the plight of the African American individual and boils it down into its simplest terms.

Community Outreach: Mainstream Pop vs. RnB

Mainstream, by definition, is the dominant trend in opinion, fashion or the arts. That being said, the most mainstream style of music is popular music, also known as pop music. Although Beyonce's album draws from Black experience, it is still a pop album. I say this because '*Lemonade*' was so commercialized that it became an album awaited by the masses not just the Black community. Additionally, Beyonce is a world renowned superstar. Therefore, her music will never target a specific community. Her platform is too large for that. Hence, in order for her to maintain her image and continue to make money, she has to appeal to that audience. Since this is true, her album had to appeal to a more globalized audience. It is for that reason,

that I conclude that her album is culturally transformative although its intention is to empower Black women.

RnB or Rhythm and Blues is characterized as a form of popular music of African American origin that arose in the 40's from blues along with the addition of jazz rhythms. This genre of music is the most common genre played in the Black community. Solange's album, an RnB album, targets the African American community specifically not only with the message it relays but also with the type of music it encompasses. As it is, Solange's platform isn't as large as Beyonce's. With that being said, it stands to reason that her album has more room for direct social commentary. '*A Seat At The Table*' offers an exploration of the nuances of Black life that '*Lemonade*' simply does not.

The words I would use to describe '*A Seat At The Table*' are as follows: topical, urgent, and necessary. The themes of her album include identity, empowerment, independence, rage, grief and healing. With that being said, Solange created a monumental piece of art from the standpoint of a Black artistic activist. Comparatively, '*Lemonade*' explores the themes of infidelity, grief, love, joy, relationships, womanhood and blackness. Her album is created by an artist that is Black. I make this distinction between the two, because although the two albums had similar intents, '*A Seat At The Table*' was more influential in terms of artistic and political goals. This doesn't detract from the celebration of Black women encompassed in the '*Lemonade*' visual album, but it does encapsulate the difference between the two albums and the efficiency of their messages of Black empowerment.